

Tridentine Community News

August 12, 2007

The Classic Form of Penance

Today we continue our coverage of the Old Form of the Sacraments with an explanation of the Sacrament of Confession. Beginning September 14, 2007, any priest of the Latin Rite may employ the Extraordinary Forms of the Sacraments without requiring permission from his bishop.

From the perspective of the penitent, the Old Form of Penance is not all that different from what one would experience in a more traditional Novus Ordo setting.

The penitent enters the confessional and says, “*Bless me Father, for I have sinned.*”

The penitent makes the Sign of the Cross while the priest says, “*The Lord be in Thy heart and on thy lips, that thou mayest rightly confess thy sins. In the name of the Father †, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*”

The penitent tells the priest how long it has been since his last Confession, then recites his sins. The penitent concludes with something to the effect of, “*For these and all my other sins, which I cannot presently remember, I am heartily sorry.*”

The priest may ask some questions and give some advice. The priest will assign a penance.

The priest then says: “*Miseréatur tui omnipotens Deus, et dimissis peccatis tuis, perducat te ad vitam æternam. Amen.*”

(In English: “May almighty God have mercy on thee, and forgive thee all thy sins, and bring thee to life everlasting. Amen.”)

Holding his right hand over the penitent, the priest says: “*Indulgéntiam, absolutiónem, et remissionem peccatorum tuorum tribuat tibi omnipotens et miséricors Dóminus. Amen.*”

(In English: “May the almighty and merciful God grant thee indulgence, absolution, and remission of all thy sins. Amen.”)

Still holding his right hand over the penitent, the priest removes any impediments to the validity of the absolution he is about to give: “*Dóminus noster Jesus Christus te absolvat; et ego auctoritate ipsius te absolvo ab omni vínculo excommunicatiónis, (suspensiónis,) et interdicti in quantum possum et tu indiges.*” If the penitent is a layman, the word “*suspensiónis*” is omitted.

(The English translation: “May our Lord Jesus Christ absolve thee; and by His authority I absolve thee from every bond of excommunication, (suspension,) and interdict, in proportion to my power and thy need.”)

The priest recites the words of absolution while both the priest and the penitent make the Sign of the Cross. A bishop makes the Sign of the Cross three times: “*Deínde ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis, in nómine Patris †, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*”

(In English: “Thereupon, I absolve thee from thy sins, in the name of the Father †, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”)

Finally, the priest says a prayer for the remission of temporal punishment due for sins: “*Passio Dómini nostri Jesu Christi, mérita Beátæ Mariæ Vírginis et ómnium Sanctórum, quidquid boni féceris, et mali sustinúeris sint tibi in remissionem peccatorum, augméntum grátiae et præmium vitæ æternæ. Amen.*”

(In English: “May the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merits of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of all the saints, whatever good you shall have done, and evil you shall have endured, be to you unto remission of sins, increase of grace, and reward of eternal life. Amen.”)

Note that the penitent is not required to make an Act of Contrition during the Old Form. The priest does retain the option to request this prior to giving absolution.

Also note that canonically, a priest does not have the right to remove every kind of bond of excommunication. That is reserved to the diocesan Ordinary (bishop). Therefore, the prayer is careful to say, “in proportion to my power”. A priest must refrain from absolving difficult cases and refer the matter to a bishop.

It is rare today for priests to discuss or address the situation of excommunication, but it is surely a reality in our modern world. The wording of the Extraordinary Form of Penance helps to remind us that absolution is a serious matter, not to be handed out casually.

Practicalities

At St. Josaphat, Cardinal Maida has given permission for Fr. Borkowski (only) to use the Tridentine Confession formula before September 14.

At Assumption, Fr. Hrytsyk will use the Old Form beginning Sunday, September 16.

The Old Form prayers will be provided to visiting priests, as well. We must be charitable if they prefer to use the New Form. Keep in mind that our Holy Father has given the priest, and not the faithful, the right to choose which form of the Sacraments to use.

